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IS ENGLAND

A MILITARY NATION

OR NOT?

A CONSIDERATION RESPECTFULLY ADDRESSED TO  
THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

BY

GENERAL SIR ROBERT GARDINER, K.C.B.,

Royal Artillery.

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SECOND EDITION.

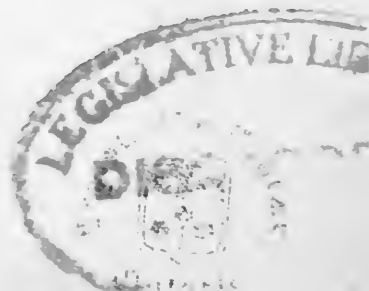
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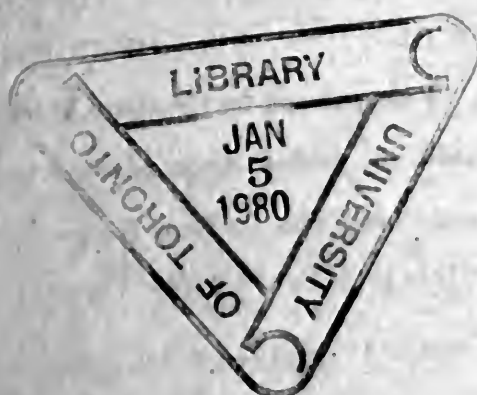
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1857.





“ But above all, for Empire and for Greatness, it importeth  
“ most, that a Nation do profess Arms as their principal  
“ Honour, Study, and Occupation.”—*Lord Bacon*.

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TO THE HONORABLE  
THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

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GENTLEMEN,

THE question that I am about to bring under your consideration is one of the most important that can engage the attention of British Statesmen or Legislators, involving alternatively the decline, or the unimpaired power, influence, and independence of England, in relation to other nations.

It is not my intention, Gentlemen, on this occasion, to occupy your attention with details of what constitutes the efficiency of Armies. My object is, to interest you in a consideration

of those broad principles of military power which give permanent security to nations, and to enquire how far those principles and that security are studied and provided for by the British Legislature, and appreciated by the British people.

Need I say, Gentlemen, that I enter on such a task, deeply impressed with a sense of all its difficulties, and that sincere and earnest respect to your high legislative authority in the State, which it is alike my duty to acknowledge and support.

I may, however, say, Gentlemen, that the question in my contemplation is of no visionary or unfounded nature. It has its rise in the known facts of our imperfect system in the equipment of our armies, disregard of their numerical capability, and indifference to their training and instruction, without which all warfare becomes a matter of chance or disaster. We hold all enemies, as well as the whole theory, practice, and science of war, too cheap. We

gain victories from the indomitable spirit of our army ; but, with an efficiently equipped and appointed force, those victories would be achieved at an infinitely smaller sacrifice of life, and with diminished expense to the country. These are facts, Gentlemen, known to Europe and to ourselves ; and it can but be advantageous to inquire how a system so damaging to the Name, and fatal to the welfare of England, can, in the face of long past and recent experience, be persevered in.

I have often been questioned by intelligent military foreigners, how it happens that we witness, in the military government of England, the most opposite extremes of parsimonious injudicious saving, and reckless prodigality of outlay—always commencing our wars unprepared, deficient in numerical force, and destitute of military material—and closing them with stored wasteful, and useless accumulation of war's first and earliest requirements.

The question is not difficult to answer. Look at it nationally and legislatively.

We are, and we are not, a military nation. We are a military nation in martial spirit, love of enterprise, physical power, and unquestioned bravery. That is all that can be looked for in the soldier.

We are not a military nation in legislative government, and thence in what constitutes military system, either in our army or our military institutions. We are, legislatively, without forethought, and of course without legislative knowledge of the requirements which form the efficiency of an army. We are not a military nation in contemning the force of an enemy—in our disregard of all experience gained in our own or other nations' wars, and consequent want of legislative conception of the construction and organization of an army. And finally, Gentlemen, in our vain thought, that any wisdom of legislature, or amount of wealth, can suddenly raise an army, or retrieve the evils of not possessing one.

Thus we see a nation of boundless and in-

creasing wealth, possessing the highest natural qualities that constitute and lead to military fame and power—from an injurious policy—never ready at the chance outbreak of war, either to assail or repulse an enemy.

The question, however, laid before you, Gentlemen, is not arrived at or fully developed by these conclusions; and, in order to correct the evils of a policy so fatal in its consequences to the country, we should possess a clear understanding of the source from whence they proceed.

They have no origin in the feeling of the country. The unfounded mistrust and prejudices, nurtured in the days of the Revolution, against “a standing army,” have long since passed away, and are now wholly obsolete. The evils of our military system will, on research, be found to be of more recent growth. I have never yet heard or seen the responsibility of our faulty military system tangibly imputed to the House of Commons; but every one knows that the councils and measures of Government, in all

military matters, are overruled by the House of Commons, and if the strength of our army is dependent on that branch of the Legislature, so must be the blame of its deficiencies, its failures, and organic imperfections.

A very slight survey of our military history, during the last half century, will shew how far this legislative controul can be brought to injure the national interests, and military name and character of England.

At the close of the war in 1816, a reduction of our military strength was made to an extent as if we were never to know war again. The government of the day remonstrated, and strongly urged the great national benefits that would ultimately accrue to the country from a slightly protracted duration of the war taxes. In vain. The House of Commons enforced their power of restrictive prohibition, and peremptorily called for an immediate repeal of the war taxes.

well grounded apprehensions were entertained that the country would be forced into a war, while in a state of total defencelessness.

The Duke of Wellington, with never failing foresight and unerring judgment, impressed on the Government the certain impending danger, and the consequences that would inevitably result from the non-existence of an army. Officers of experience, also illustrated in detail the broad representations of the existing danger, in reports of the deficiencies in their various branches of Her Majesty's service.

A Committee of the House of Commons was accordingly assembled, to examine and report on the Army, Navy, and Ordnance Estimates. 1847-8.

Evidence was heard, and a Report made by the Committee to the House of Commons. But our home and foreign defences were left unheeded, and England continued to remain without an army.

It was during that long interval of peace and

disregard of military defence, that, while discussing the danger to which the country was exposed, a Master-General of the Ordnance assured me that "Government were fully aware  
 "of the danger, but that the House of Commons  
 "would not grant the means to enable them to  
 "correct it; that in the Ordnance department he  
 "received a limited sum, admitted to be inadequate to the required expenditure, which he was  
 "at liberty to dispense as he thought best, but  
 "that no further means would be afforded him."

Report to  
 Committee of  
 the House of  
 Commons, on  
 the Army,  
 Navy, and  
 Ordnance Estimates, March  
 31, 1848.

You will scarcely believe, Gentlemen, that the economy of the House of Commons had, at that time, reduced the Field Artillery of the British Army to 34 guns, inadequately horsed, unskilfully manned, and even without the means of moving with their ammunition waggons. As for guns of position in the field, there was actually not a 9-pounder gun equipped for service in the whole United Kingdom.

The passing events in Europe at the time averted the danger from England; but our im-



provident economy was soon after manifested in direst consequences to the country and the army.

A remote and arduous war called us to the East.

The brilliant victories of that war were clouded by sufferings from privation, overwork, and unmatched numbers in conflict, that have never been surpassed in British warfare.

The House of Commons shared with the Sovereign and the country, in deepest sympathy, for the sufferings of the army. Millions—any amount of national pecuniary sacrifice, was voted for its relief. It was too late. The past military policy of the House of Commons had commenced its work—manifesting its consequences in fearful devastation in the ranks of the army.

Fault was loudly attributed to the Government. The Government had nothing to do with it. The disasters of that army, arising from

overwork, inadequate numbers, and inefficient and imperfect equipment, were the inevitable result of a past legislative restrictive system, persevered in by the House of Commons; and to the House of Commons alone can the responsibility of such a system be attributed. The firm and vigorous hand of the present Minister for War, established efficiency in the army after the lapse of two years—but not before the economical policy of the House of Commons had brought sorrow and mourning to every home in England.

There are many questions of grave import that suggest reflections on the influences of an ascendancy of pecuniary control in a branch of the Legislature, which, however constitutionally derived, has hitherto, at various periods of critical emergency, impaired and paralyzed the Executive Powers of the State, and can but ultimately affect the destinies of England. And, perhaps, to arrive at just conclusions on a question intended to be of exclusively military character, no moment would be more fitting for its consideration than the present—circumstances of public

notoriety have occurred in which the whole country have taken part—and which have placed in irrefragable distinctive contrast the military feeling of the country, and the military policy of the House of Commons.

At the opening of the last Session of the late Parliament, the note first sounded by the House of Commons was for Military Retrenchment. And the Government, as in 1816, were compelled to repeal the war tax, before the expenses of the Russian and Persian wars had been paid.

This, of course, inevitably led to an immediate extensive reduction of the army.

At this juncture, the Government of the country was placed in an apparently inextricable embarrassment.

From an unforeseen national emergency, the Government were called on to equip an armament for the repression of a remote outrage on the lives and property of British, and of British

naturalized subjects ; and the House of Commons, with all the recollections of the waste of life and treasure in the Crimean War fresh and strong upon their minds, suddenly stopped payment—or, in other words, passed a vote of censure on the intended purposes of the Government—thus compelling an alternative of resignation, or an appeal to the country for that supply and support, which was refused by them in a case involving the honour and commercial interests of England.

In this case, our flag had been insulted—an international treaty with another country violated—our power defied—the Queen's subjects barbarously murdered, and their property unlawfully seized and confiscated. The country nobly and energetically responded to the appeal of the Government, and the result has shewn, that the interests and honour of England are at times seen in incontestibly different lights by the House of Commons and the national constituency.

During a long observation of public events,

I can call to mind no similar ebullition of popular feeling since the days of Pitt—when in a moment of threatened peril, the country, as if impelled by one simultaneous impulse, rose up armed at the patriot Minister's voice, to meet and repel the impending danger.

At the present moment, as in those former proud days of patriotic independence, the policy of the Government and the feeling of the people have been truly and emphatically English; the whole crisis is full of instruction, and forms an episode in our history of parliamentary strategy that will not be lost on posterity.

There existed a party in the late elective branch of the Legislature, who, on all and every occasion, openly opposed and contemned military power as the bulwark of national security, and as confidently appeared to place their trust in wealth as a nation's firmest strength and surest safeguard.

Wealth is power, if we have power to defend

our wealth ; otherwise we but trust in a fallacious apothegm, and render ourselves a prey to more powerful nations, who will not fail in time to possess themselves of the wealth we are unable to defend.

It is difficult to keep wisdom and legislation in equal relative ratio in the changes which are rapidly succeeding each other in all the governments of the world. It behoves us therefore to be the more cautious, more guarded against neglecting or casting off certain security, less prone to adopt chimerical axioms of experimental legislature.

The just balance of legislative and political power in our Constitution has hitherto been deemed its chief strength and permanent security. As long as that unrivalled political fabric is left unscathed and unimpaired, England defended by an adequate and efficient army, may confidently calculate on the maintenance of her supremacy in independence and the wealth of commerce. But we must religiously preserve the

due equilibrium of that Constitution, in which power and responsibility are so wisely blended, that, if invaded, or departed from, its vitality must inevitably be endangered. At a time when the nations of the earth are in a race for political power, the highest legislative wisdom is that of mature consideration, with purity and disinterestedness of purpose. If we depart from those sacred principles, the very liberty we possess will become the cause of our decline. There is no wisdom in Government, or permanent stability of national power, dignity, or greatness, apart from public virtue. It is immutably so decreed for man's welfare, and the conditions on which nations have their rise and fall.

In prosecuting the inquiries involved in the question submitted to your consideration, Gentlemen, I will, at the risk of entering into too much detail, solicit your attention to the broad errors of our military policy, as they are manifested in our legislation, and disastrous results in actual warfare.

And first, as to the legislative character of our military policy.

The legislative discussions of the House of Commons, in regard to military matters, have hitherto been exclusively of a pecuniary character. They have had little reference as to any thing that constitutes the efficiency of an army. What single voice is heard in the councils of the country, that ever weighs against decrees of military character, passed in total inexperience of military detail or purpose? Among the legislators of the House of Commons, how many are there who do not compute the strength of our army by its cost, rather than by the exigencies of the country for which it is required? How many think of, and frame the army to, the increase of force required by the national acquisition of vast remote territory and dominion? Or for the maintainance of England's relative influence and power in the scale of nations? How many make such considerations the base on which military legislation should be calculated and guided? How many reflect that a nation



of England's extent and wealth can never remain independent without an army? How many who, in their own minds, do not make provision for the cost of an army, their last, instead of their first thought? How many who thus charge themselves with the destinies of the country, have made the composition, the constitution, the discipline and training, and the instruction of an army their serious thought or study? How many, who from education or pursuits in life, are capable of judging on such matters? or possess even any superficial knowledge of the most ordinary details of military requirements?

Believe me, Gentlemen, when I assure you, that the errors of military legislation, shewn in our past inadequate numerical force, untrained, uninstructed, and incompletely equipped, cannot be retrieved by a late after prodigality of wealth; and, pardon me, if in too bold a confidence I add, that in the attempt to retrieve such errors, millions have been unnecessarily and unavailingly squandered by the false legislative economy of the House of Commons.

And next, as to the Legislative influence of our military policy.

Many who may hear of this address, will satisfy themselves with recollections of the success that has, on almost all occasions attended the British arms—some unconscious, and some unmindful of the unnecessary sacrifice of life and treasure, entailed by their past improvident economy.

If our military power is to be feared by other nations, it must also be respected by them. It can never otherwise be permanently successful. It is notorious, that the heroism of the British Army is both crippled and clouded in the eyes of other nations, by the injudicious restrictive measures of that branch of the Legislature by which its strength and efficiency is controlled. This must ever be the case, as long as the House of Commons take on themselves the initiative in legislation, and the responsibility which attaches exclusively to the Executive Government.

We must correct the influences of our past

legislative errors, by more deeply studying the military policy of other nations, and adapt our policy to meet them in warfare, with fair comparative strength and completeness of power. The aggregated army of England forms a large numerical force, but it has points to defend over the whole earth; and when suddenly recalled from those national outposts at the outbreak of war, we leave those points defenceless, without gaining an army that can be considered on an equally efficient footing with the trained and organized armies of other nations.

That we are a military nation in spirit, courage, enterprize, and hardy endurance of privation, there can be no doubt.

That the national aptitude for warfare has hitherto been unheeded, uncared for, and uncultivated by that branch of the Legislature whose province it is to nurture and find means for the proper necessary training and instruction of our army, is another truth beyond all doubt.

The future, like the past military policy of

the country, has to take its character and influence from the legislative control of the House of Commons.

The history of the world is open to our enquiry, and the recorded fate of nations bent on accumulating wealth, and regardless of military power, offer prophetic warning for our instruction. The people of England have spoken trumpet-tongued against the endurance of national wrong, insult, or indignity, and it only remains with the House of Commons to vindicate the inglorious reproach of our not being a military nation, and by their legislative acts and policy to cast it off for ever.

There is yet a party of past prejudicial influence in the military policy of England that I have not yet adverted to. I mean the so-called Peace Party. They have no feeling in common with the nation as to its military renown or power, yet they recently held a legislative control over our military security and permanent greatness.

The independence of nations does not consist in their social freedom, nor can it be secured by legislative assumption of power; far less can it be calculated on under the uncontrollable contingencies of uninterrupted peace. Those who build their views of national independence in certain exemption from war, look but on the surface of things.

We have heard the words, "Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform," made passwords to elective favour.

Far wiser would it be in legislators to keep before the country its indispensably necessary pecuniary State requirements, and cherish that readiness to meet them, which is never withheld when the wants of the country are put openly and unreservedly before the country, as in the emergency which led to the late appeal, when an unmistakeable national feeling alike impelled those possessing the elective franchise, and those without its pale. Those who, in blind visionary error, or who sophisterize on peace and military

retrenchment, delude the country, and but play with its vital power and interests. If the nations of the whole earth were to combine in one league and bond of universal peace, such a league for the purposes of maintaining permanent peace, constituted as man is, would be profitless as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Neither social freedom, nor civilization, nor commerce, nor perfection in the arts, or knowledge of all science, or boundless riches, will give peace to nations divested of the means of self-defence.

Before concluding these remarks, I have a personal duty, Gentlemen, to fulfil, in justice to myself, and respect to your high legislative power in the State, and which leads me to hope for your indulgence to the imperfect manner in which I am aware I have submitted a question of first national importance to your consideration. Conscious that I have no claim to your attention, beyond experience in common with other officers of a long period of service, I can only regret that the subject has not been brought under your notice by a more competent hand. Still, Gen-

tllemen, I feel assured that the task I have ventured to undertake will lose nothing of its importance in your estimation, from its inadequate and imperfect fulfilment.

I consider it unnecessary, while addressing the House of Commons of England, to deprecate any thought, that a proceeding of such unusual character as that I have ventured on, could possibly be undertaken by an officer of the British Army, but from motives of duty and interest in the national welfare.

Neither, Gentlemen, is it from any morbid belief that the country ought for ever to be necessarily under arms, that I have endeavoured to impress on your attention the dangers of legislating on an unmilitary policy.

The great masters, from whose example the officers of the British Army have chiefly derived instruction, studied war but for the exalted purposes of attaining and ensuring the maintenance of peace.

Sir John  
Moore.  
The Duke of  
Wellington.

Personally, I could have no object in addressing you. My military career has ran its course; and in the future, I have nothing to desire or hope for but the power to labour to the last with such experience as I possess, in furtherance of the more active and energetic duties of that honoured service, which, with Her Majesty's Navy, by their ardent zeal, their undaunted enterprize, heroic valour, pure patriotism, and devoted loyalty, sustain the high name, the mighty power, and the international influence of England.

I might here close all further observation, if the subject did not court some reference to our home defences, in connection with the chances and possibility of invasion.

Putting aside the probability of future invasion, I will speak only as to its possibility. The defeat of any future combined armada, would at the moment retrieve the country from a short temporary subjugation—but every prudent man would quail under the responsibility of leaving



the country unprepared for such a chance of danger, however firm his convictions might be of its military security.

In a Report addressed to a Committee of the May 31, 1803. House of Commons, at a past period of threatened danger, relative to a branch of the service then in a state of utter destitution, I adverted to the questioned chance of invasion, and exemplified not only the facility of an enemy's landing on our shores, but the astounding actual fact of an enemy's having, in the recollection of some of us still living, not only landed on our shores, but remained for some weeks masters of English territory.

The arrival of an enemy on our shores, and his safe departure from them, make it clear that even a very superior commanding naval force, is not a certain security against invasion.

May I earnestly entreat your recollection and thought, Gentlemen, to the changed character and augmented facilities that have taken

place in warfare since those days, when England's insular position gave her advantages equivalent to numbers in the military power of other nations? We have now to be ever prepared for the facility with which any amount of numbers may be transported from any distance to as many points as they choose of the extensive litoral boundary of England. We know that there are powers of vast numerical force, who will not fail to profit by the experience of the last war. They will bide their time, but we may be sure they will turn their experience to account, whenever it suits their purpose or their interests to do so.

With your permission, Gentlemen, I will close these observations with an extract, bearing on the subject, from the Report I have alluded to :—

Report addressed to the Committee of the House of Commons, on the Army, Navy, and Ordnance Estimates, 1848, continued in 1849.

“The future safety of this country must be provided for no less by an adequate and efficient land force, than a powerful and commanding navy. England is now confident

“from her past insular safety, and exemption  
 “from the sufferings of war known to all other  
 “nations. The thought of invasion is laughed  
 “at, and held as impossible. When it comes,  
 “it will be the more dreadful, from our blind  
 “neglect and unprepared state.

“I do not, in insisting on the facility of inva-  
 “sion, mean to imply that England would be  
 “conquered on the first successful landing of  
 “an enemy’s army. That can never be. But  
 “England’s name would be obscured; her soil  
 “and homes dishonoured; and her greatness,  
 “power, and influence, pass away for a long  
 “series of years, after a conflict and endurance  
 “of horrors, such as perhaps war never yet  
 “inflicted.”

I have the honour to be,

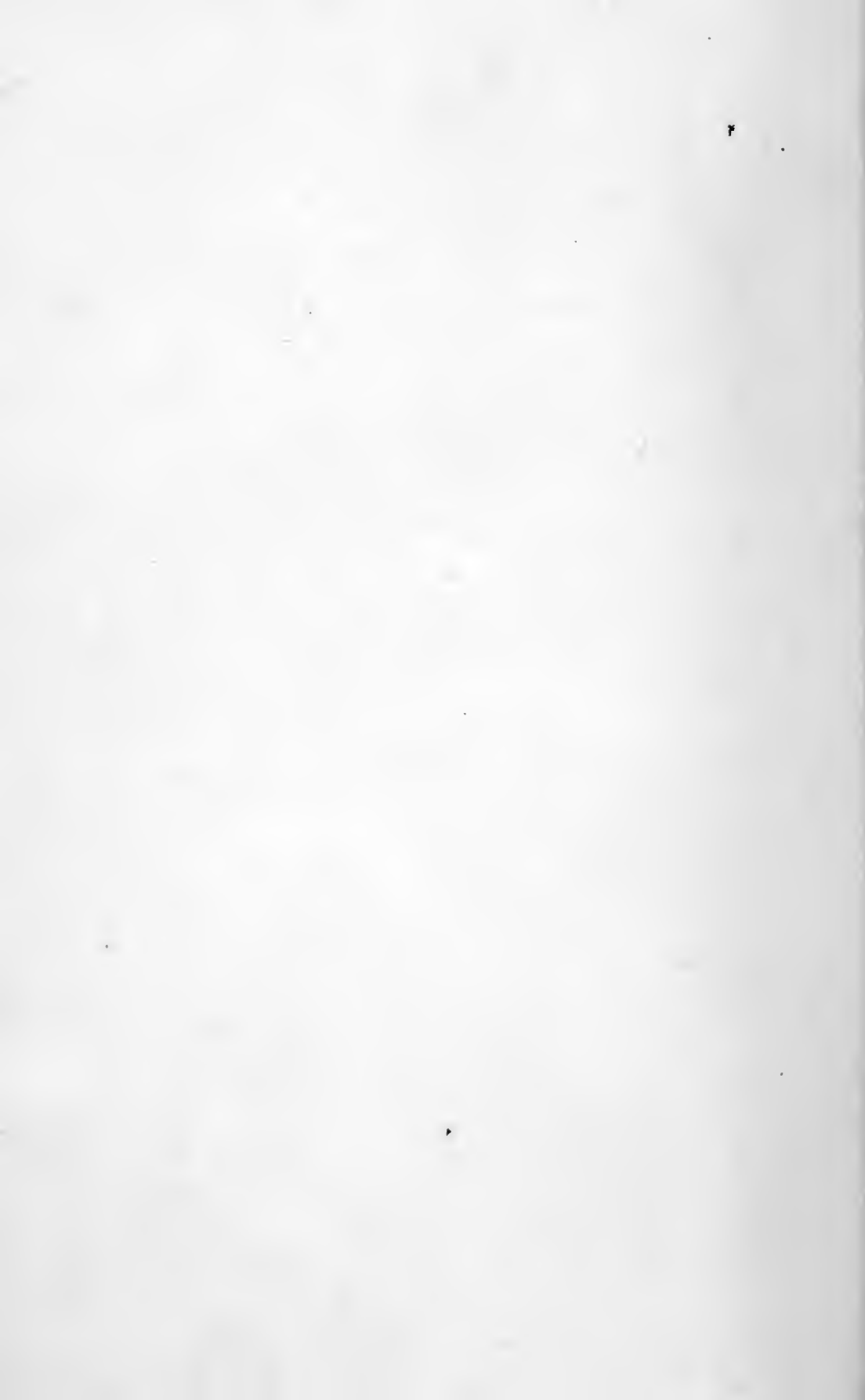
Gentlemen,

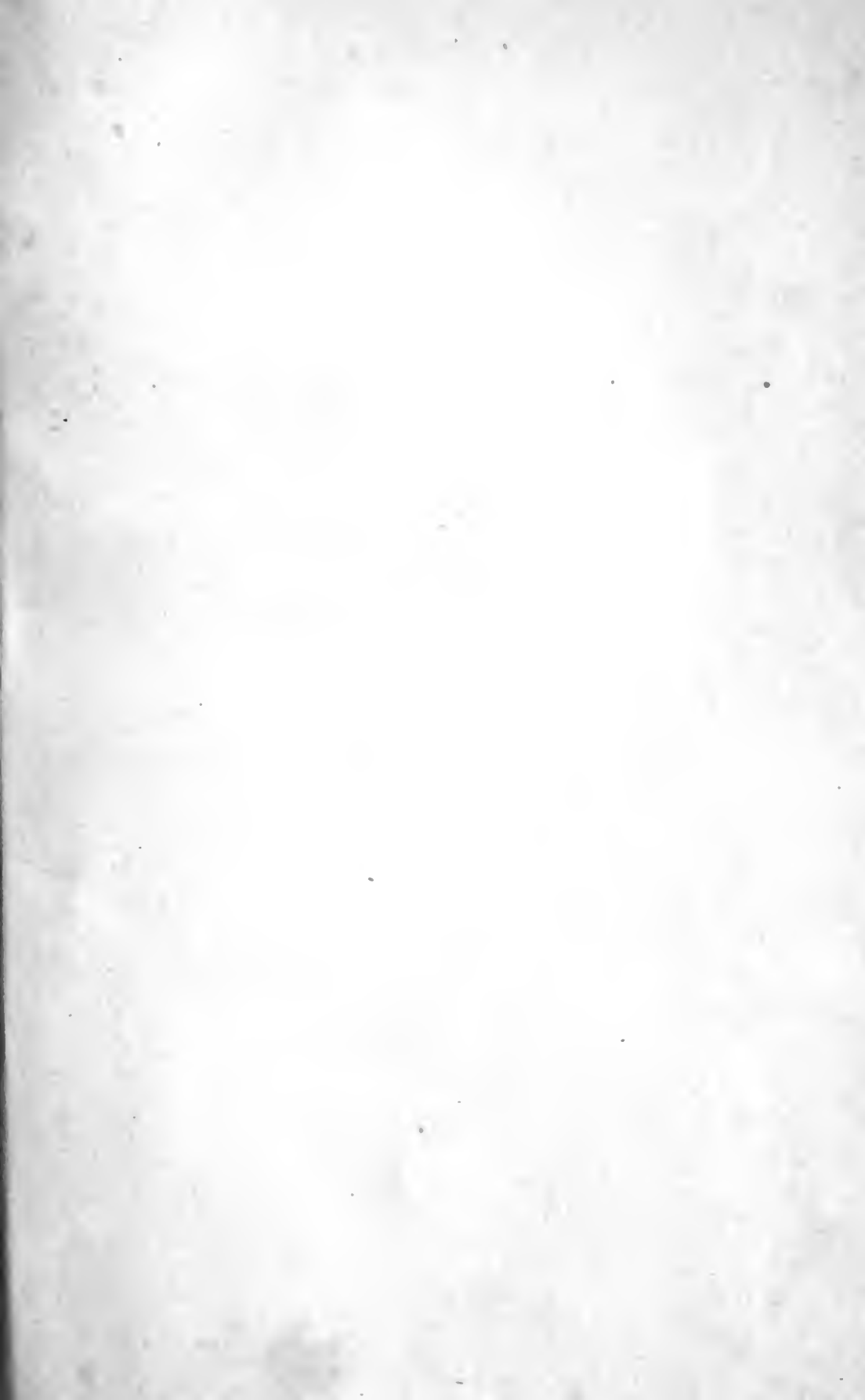
With profound respect,

Your most humble obedient Servant,

ROBERT GARDINER.

*May 2nd, 1857.*







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